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A
RETROSPECTIVE GLANCE
AT THE
PROGRESSIVE STATE
OF
THE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY
OF MONTREAL,

WITH A VIEW TO ASCERTAINING HOW FAR IT HAS ADVANCED THE
IMPORTANT OBJECTS CONTEMPLATED BY ITS FOUNDERS:

BEING

A LECTURE,

Delivered before the Natural History Society, on the 31st March, 1852,

AND

PUBLISHED BY DESIRE OF THE SOCIETY.

BY MAJOR R. LACHLAN.

"Nosce te ipsum."

"Trust not yourself; but your defects to know,
Make use of every friend,—and every foe."—*Pope.*

MONTREAL:

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DEDICATION.

*To the President and Members of the Natural History
Society :*

GENTLEMEN,

The candid and well-meant, yet unpretending observations contained in the following pages, having been deemed worthy of a more extended circulation than the limited audience before whom they were delivered, their writer cannot make a better response to your wishes than by unreservedly allowing them to take their fate, "with all their imperfections on their head"—most respectfully re-addressed and dedicated to those for whose benefit they were more immediately intended; and he accordingly does so, in the earnest hope that the Natural History Society of Montreal will yet attain that eminent position to which its important and interesting objects give it a right to aspire, and that even *his* humble efforts in so good a cause will not prove altogether in vain.

I have the honor to be,

Gentlemen,

Your Very Obedient Servant,

THE AUTHOR.

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A RETROSPECTIVE GLANCE

AT THE

Progressive State of the Natural History Society OF MONTREAL, &c.

Having, perhaps rather unwisely, consented to allow my name to be enrolled among the Lecturers before the Natural History Society this season, and perhaps still more so, though with the best intentions, selected as my topic, "*A Retrospective Glance at the Progressive State of the Society itself*," with a view to estimating how far it has accomplished the patriotic objects contemplated by its founders, you will not be surprised at my begging permission to offer a few preliminary remarks, explanatory of, as well as apologetic for, the boldness of a *Stranger*, in thus venturing to appear before you as the agitator of a local subject of so much importance; as well as, in some respects, of a rather delicate and even embarrassing character: and I would, at the same time, take the opportunity of bespeaking the patient indulgence of the *fair* portion of my audience in particular, towards a subject, which to them must, I fear, be dry and uninteresting at best.

Permit me, then, with all due deference to others, to remark, that though the old classic saying, "*Ne sutor ultra crepidam*," or, in plain English, "*Let the Cobbler stick to his last*," may be all very well in the abstract, and it might therefore be inferred that an old soldier would be the least fitted to enter an arena such as that now before me; still it must be conceded that there happen to be always two or three subjects on which all men seem, as it were intuitively, to feel themselves privileged to express an opinion. One of these is *Music*, of which we are all more or less susceptible; another is *Politics*, with which, thank God, we have nothing to do here; and a third is the general state and even advancement of *knowledge*; in which, whatever may be said to the contrary, I venture to think that every member of the community, whatever may be his social position, can more or less take an influential part.

In support of this opinion, I could readily adduce a host of learned

authorities ; but I prefer trusting to the record of my own observation and experience, as expressed in the following remarks, made by me some ten years ago, before a limited local literary and philosophical Society, with which I happened to be then connected :—

“In taking the chair on that occasion, it was *not* because I fancied myself, by any means, better qualified for the duty than many whom I saw present, but because having long earnestly desired to witness the foundation of such an association, and being anxious to do all in my power to advance so commendable an object, I also felt that I should thereby have an opportunity of affording, in my own person, an appropriate example of what I have had some difficulty in convincing most of my friends, namely,—that to be a useful, *though unlearned*, member of a literary and philosophical society, requires neither the previous qualification of rare literary talents, or great scientific or philosophical acquirements, but simply a sincere love of knowledge, and an earnest desire to seek and profit by every opportunity of acquiring information and instruction in the society of those who may be able to impart it. Nay, I even go farther, and say, that though men of learning may be required to lead the way in the more abstruse and unfrequented paths of research, so intimately are science and philosophy in one way or another united and interwoven with the ordinary pursuits and occupations of life, that, in a society aiming at *mutual instruction*, such as ours is designed to be, it is in the power of almost every reflecting, moderately educated man, to bear a part in the practical illustration of some subject or other, without any previous pretensions to what is termed classical learning.

“It is true that the proposal for establishing such a society may be received with coldness and indifference by some, from whom the very reverse was to have been expected, and that others may have urged as their excuse for not joining us, that they considered the thing altogether impracticable in the present state of our population and society, though it *might*, perhaps, succeed some fifty years hence ! But, instead of being discouraged by such apathetic remarks, they ought only to inspire us with greater zeal and perseverance in the endeavour to realize the laudable object we have in view. But, gentlemen, all past experience will bear ample testimony to the fact, that neither the march of intellect, the extension of science, nor the advance of discovery, are to be measured by the tardy progressive lapse of a certain number of “*slow revolving years*,” otherwise, where, let me ask, would have been the recent numerous invaluable, yet almost simultaneous discoveries in modern *Chemistry*, or the sudden development of the till lately considered infant science of *Geology* ? and where, also, the rapid transition, from the first experiment, to the practical application of *Gas* to all its useful and brilliant purposes ? and where, above all, would have been the truly wonderful, nay, almost miraculous, results of the successive researches directed to the employment of that versatile and almost omnipotent agent, *Steam* ? whether connected with machinery, manufactures, locomotion, or navigation ; that,

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as it were, disdainfully anticipating centuries of gradual time and space, as far as human life and distance are concerned, have at once burst upon an astonished world in an hundred forms, and yet whose truly gigantic powers may, after all, be said to be still only in their *infancy*! Yes, let but that great desideratum, a *right earnest inclination*, or zealous emulative impulse, be once happily felt and fairly roused, and natural genius, cultivated talent, or persevering industry, and sometimes even lucky accident, will frequently overcome the most discouraging, and, till boldly grappled with, apparently insurmountable obstacles and difficulties; and, in a moment, to our own utter surprise and delight, hurry us on centuries in advance of the sluggish anticipations or calculations of the dull, doubting age in which we happen to live.

"Be it also remembered, for our further encouragement, that some of even the most celebrated Literary and Philosophical Associations of modern Europe, have taken their rise from very humble beginnings, and that the greater proportion also sprung up rather simultaneously; than progressively, as it were, by the mere power of emulous example, among nations speaking different languages, and arrived at, by no means, the same degree of civilization; and it is a singular fact, that splendid and extended as most of these national institutions now are, there are not many that can boast of having been much more than a century in active existence."

If these observations were applicable to a Society such as then addressed, they must be equally so to one avowedly embracing the whole round of *Natural History*; and, it is in the capacity of the same humble but observant gleaner, and not at all as the pretender to anything like erudition or scientific acquirements, that I now venture to appear before you.

Thus much being, I trust, conceded to me, may I next be permitted to observe, although again somewhat egotistic, that, though moving in the unpretending path to which I have alluded, it has been my fortune to have seen a good deal of "*Men and Manners*," in different parts of the world, and to have derived much benefit as well as satisfaction from being the humble associate of more than one *Literary Institution*, without its at all tending to make good the old sarcastic remark of the Poet, that

"A little learning is a dangerous thing;"

for, whatever may be said to the contrary, I will aver, as I have ever felt, that be the effect what it may upon *fools*, upon every man of common sense it will ever be productive of a desire for *further knowledge*; and, instead of puffing him up with empty conceit, will, even at the last, make him feel, with all humility, that, be his acquirements what they may, he is still only entering upon *the threshold of knowledge*. With myself, at all events, the feeling has ever been, that "a little learning is a *delightful thing*;" and that, like money, if properly laid out, it will ever be sure to produce more; and that, if it did nothing more than occasionally induce

either the unprofessional idle, or the plodding man of business to take an occasional sip of the inviting cream which floats on the surface of science, without encountering the trouble of diving deep into its abstract or abstruse arcana, it will have undeniably added so much, at least, to the unalloyed rational enjoyments of life.

As I trust that this also will be readily conceded, I now proceed to add a few words in defence of the particular topic I have chosen, and to which I would entreat the same indulgent hearing. To be brief, then, some five years ago I arrived in Montreal, in expectation of being only a *transient* resident; but, from accidental circumstances, here I am still, in the same unsettled predicament, though, perhaps, more likely to become one of its permanent citizens than at any former time. Be that as it may; professing to have a humble taste for literary and scientific pursuits, I, on my arrival, of course rejoiced not a little at the prospect of benefitting much by the varied labors of a Literary and Philosophical Institution, with so promising and prepossessing a title as "The Natural History Society of Montreal," and I accordingly hastened to have the pleasure of contemplating its past and passing acts, which I naturally expected to find exemplified in not only a large and select Library, and well arranged collections of specimens in every branch of the Natural History of Canada, but, also, in the existence of a number of interesting published volumes of transactions, embracing an instructive series of annual addresses by its successive Presidents, as well as occasional Lectures on a variety of subjects. Having stated what were my expectations, it is painful to be obliged to add, that in more respects than one I found myself greatly disappointed.

Thus mortified, I naturally endeavoured to account for so unexpected a state of things; and, therefore, set about making a few enquiries into the progressive history of the Society; and from what I learnt, it was not long before I came to the disheartening conclusion, that unless some "change should come o'er the spirit of the dream" of its lethargic members, as well as over the utterly apathetic feeling, or rather total want of feeling with which the local public seem to regard so important an Institution, and of which they ought to be proud,—no benefit would result to the country from its *mere NAME*, if it did not even cease to exist in the course of a very few years.

How far I have been borne out in this discouraging view of the matter, by the facts that have come to my knowledge, and how far the truly good and great patriotic objects contemplated by the founders of the Society are likely to be, after all, realized, by more creditable, energetic endeavours by all parties, forms the burthen of the hurried unmethodical remarks to which I am now about to call your indulgent attention.

The important subject which I propose to discuss may be arranged into three parts, or branches: 1st. A retrospective glance at the

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past history of the Society ; 2nd. An impartial and dispassionate review of its present state ; and, 3rd. The proffer of a few hints as to what steps might or ought to be taken to place so highly valuable and useful an association in a position to do justice to the excellent objects which it has ever professed to have in view,—in the discussion of all of which I purpose to adopt as my undeviating guide—

“ Nothing extenuate and set down naught in malice.”

With regard to the 1st head,—the following are among the progressive particulars, which, in the unfortunate absence of direct records, from a cause to be hereafter noticed, up to 1844, I have been enabled to glean from indirect sources, such as a few of the annual reports of its Council up to 1836, and one of the local prints ; while from 1844 I have been kindly permitted to consult the official minute book of the Association.

The Natural History Society of Montreal was founded in 1827, under the patronage of that excellent nobleman, the late Earl of Dalhousie, who, notwithstanding his retirement from the Governor Generalship of Canada, was deservedly continued as its honorary patron till his decease, not less than ten years afterwards. Its first meeting was held on the 18th of May of the same year ; and its first President was the late Stephen Sewell, Esq., a gentleman, to whose exertions the Society was much indebted. By the original constitution and by-laws, a copy of which is now before me, I find that the number of original members was 26, of whom about 7 are still residing in Montreal ; though, I am sorry to say, that of all that praiseworthy band, only *one* has perseveringly and consistently adhered to the Institution, which he was mainly instrumental in founding ; and, to his honor be it mentioned, that worthy individual is *Dr. Holmes*, who may therefore now be regarded as the venerable *Patriarch* of the Natural History Society.

Such was the generous impetus given to the Society during the first year, that at its close the number of ordinary members had increased to no less than 93 ; that of corresponding members to 32, and of honorary members to 18.

From that time to 1832, when it became incorporated by Act of the Provincial Parliament, (2d William IV., Cap. 15,) to which the royal sanction was given in February, 1833, the Society continued gradually to gain ground, and to receive considerable accessions of members, both ordinary and honorary,—the former then amounting to about 100, of whom the greater portion are still alive, though only about 13 are now connected with the Institution. It may here be further noted that the progressive increase of ordinary members, up to 1836, without reference to occasional retirements, was, in 1828-9, 12 ; in 1829-30, 15 ; in 1830-31, 7 ; in 1831-2, 18 ; in 1832-3, 7 ; in 1833-4, 6 ; and in 1834-5, 8 ; up to which time, though various influential gentlemen filled the office of President, the more arduous duties of Corresponding Secretary continued to be performed by Dr.

Holmes. It may also be added, that, during this year, (1835,) the list of ordinary members had increased to about 125; that of corresponding members, to about 90; and of honorary members, to 25. My reasons for noticing so particularly these and similar numerical details, will be evident hereafter. It is sufficient to state at present, that my information up to this date is mainly derived from a series of annual reports, delivered in by the Council, and printed in small pamphlet form, for the general information of the members; but that these valuable and interesting documents appearing to have been then discontinued, and, what is rather extraordinary, the whole of the official minutes and other papers belonging to the Society, from its foundation up to the year 1844, having, somehow, *been lost*, I have been obliged to glean the greater part of the remaining particulars, up to the latter date, from the files of the *Montreal Herald*.

At the annual meeting in May, 1836, the indefatigable corresponding secretary, Dr. Holmes, was deservedly called to preside, assisted by Mr., now Judge, McCord, as corresponding secretary, and an otherwise well selected council, from whom much was naturally expected; and accordingly, among other cheering proceedings, we find, out of three classes of prize essays, two of a very interesting *Provincial* character, namely: one, "*On the Physical History of Rivers in general, and of the St. LAWRENCE, in particular*;" and the other, "*On the Circumstances which affect Climate in general, and that of CANADA in particular*,"—both of which philosophical subjects happen to have a good deal attracted my own attention.

During the following year the Society were enabled to effect a purchase of the commodious mansion, in a room of which we are now assembled, but at a price which compelled them to rent the greater portion of it up to the present time. In the meantime, however, under the zealous auspices of Dr. Holmes, seconded by Mr. Essen as Vice President, who may be regarded as another main founder of the Society, as well as by the continued valuable services of Mr. McCord, as Corresponding Secretary, the number of ordinary members continued to increase, donations of minerals and other valuable gifts to pour in apace, and the Library to be considerably augmented. Add to which, the Council being very desirous of acquiring correct knowledge of the meteorology of British North America, had addressed circulars to the various corresponding members of the Society, as well as to the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Territory, calling attention to this interesting subject, and praying for their co-operation. Nor was this all; for it was *this* Council that first drew the attention of the Government to the great advantages that would result from a *Geological Survey* of the Province; and, therefore, had the Natural History Society effected no other good, they can at least claim the merit and honor of being the originators of the *valuable Geological Survey of Canada, now in progress, under the able direction of their justly distinguished associate, Mr William Logan*.

Of 1838, '39, and '40, probably owing to the disturbed state of the

times, and other reasons already stated, I have been able to glean but few particulars worth recording, as will be further adverted to hereafter, with the exception of Lord Gosford being elected Patron of the Society; and all that need be noticed of 1841, and '42, connected with the annual meetings in May, is, that at that of the latter year, William Badgley, Esq., was elected President, and Rev. Mr. Essen, Vice President; but that it would appear that no proceedings or report of Council, for either year, were ever published; and that, I believe, during the same year, Sir Charles Bagot was invited to accept of the office of Patron.

In the meantime, however, a very important movement connected with the Society had taken place, under the auspices of the *Government*, which, somehow, appears to have never been acted upon. I allude to an ordinance of 6 Victoria, Cap. 2, (6th Feb. 1841,) which, on the completion of the public edifice now known by the name of the *Bonsecours Market Buildings*, made provision for the joint property of the *Natural History Society*, the *Mechanics' Institute*, and the *Montreal Library*, being there *united*, and placed under the control of the *Municipal authorities* of the city, for the purpose of forming from this union *one grand association*, under the name and style of "*the Montreal Institute of Literature, Science, and Arts*," to be guided by certain provisions, rules, and regulations, detailed in the ordinance, and which appeared to be of a highly satisfactory character; and by the same ordinance the Corporation were authorized to apply an annual sum (from what fund I know not,) of £300, for the purpose of increasing the Library and Museum.

What prevented this liberal-minded measure being carried into effect, I have been unable to learn. Had such been the case, much good must have inevitably resulted, particularly should our literary French compatriots, who have since so successfully formed the *Canadian Institute*, have been thereby led to amalgamate, and a noble beginning been thus made in the right quarter, to get rid of those narrow sectional feelings and prejudices, which I cannot help regarding as the very bane of Canada, and to which a further blow would have been struck, had the association then happily assumed a *Provincial title* instead of its limited local one.

Of 1843, and the early part of 1844, *i. e.*, up to and including the annual meeting in May of the latter year, I have been unable to consult any official records; but at length, on being permitted to refer to the minute book of the Society, *commencing 30th July, 1844*, I find Mr. Brondgeest then President, and Dr. Fraser, Corresponding Secretary, but with *that* monthly meeting dwindled down to 6 members, and that of the following December to only 5, and at that in February of the following year, only 4 present, while it would appear that not more than one or two straggling new members were elected in the interim,—and yet the Society that year received a donation of £100 from Government!

In May, 1845, the presiding chair was filled by Dr. McCulloch,

with Dr. Fraser, Secretary, and Mr. A. Larocque, Librarian and Museum Keeper; and it being then supposed that the high rate of the annual subscriptions deterred many from becoming members, these were reduced from five to two dollars. In the meantime, a committee was appointed to obtain gentlemen to lecture during the winter, in fulfillment of the terms on which the late Rev. Mr. Somerville, minister of the Scotch congregation of St. Gabriel street church, had, much to his honor, bequeathed to the Society a liberal donation of £1000; and such, in other respects, was the temporary spirit infused into the proceedings of the Society at this period, that about 30 new members were enrolled, and no less than 17 large folios of American plants, containing 2000 specimens, were presented to the Society by Mr. McCrae, and 500 Canadian, and 250 exotic plants by Dr. Holmes, besides 300 from the neighbourhood of Edinburgh, in Scotland, by Dr. Hall.

While thus cursorily noticing these valuable donations, it is but justice to Dr. Holmes and Dr. Hall to add, that the former, besides long discharging the responsible duties of Corresponding Secretary, had with great care and assiduity drawn up a complete catalogue of the valuable and extensive mineralogical and geological cabinet belonging to the Society; and that the latter, besides for a number of years officiating as Recording Secretary, prepared, with equal care, a catalogue of the zoological department of the Museum, in the course of which, he had the pleasure of discovering a new species of the *Caprimulgus* tribe, which, on being submitted to the celebrated ornithologist, Audubon, was by him declared to be the case, and which the Dr., therefore, proposed to name after that gentleman. It may be further added, that the catalogues above alluded to are those now in use in the Society's rooms.

In 1846-7, during which, Dr. Crawford presided, an abortive attempt was made to recover the *missing* records of the Society; but, *like the lost tribes of Israel*, they remain undiscovered to this day; and, during the same year, an effort was made to add to the popularity of the Museum, by throwing it open to the public—each visitor paying 1s. 3d.—but apparently in vain; and, in the meantime, the number of old members was evidently on the wane, while the accession of new ones continued to take place by dribblets of one and two.

In January, 1847, our present Governor General, Lord Elgin, was invited to become Patron of the Society, in the room of the estimable Lord Metcalfe, deceased; and His Lordship willingly accepted of that honorary office; and, in the meantime, hopes were entertained of infusing fresh vigor into the Society's proceedings by the appointment of a Committee to enquire into its actual state, and to *devise the best means for more fully carrying out its objects*, by THE PUBLICATION OF THE ESSAYS NOW IN ITS POSSESSION, or otherwise. But it unfortunately so happened that that Committee were obliged to make the mortified report,—*That they had searched for any such document—in vain!* In April of the same year a

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resolution was passed reducing the subscription of life members from £10 to £5; but with what beneficial results I am not prepared to say.

The following year (1847-8,) during which Doctor David presided, was remarkable for a continued falling off in the number of members, and a singular degree of lethargy in the council of the Society,—the monthly meetings, of August, September, October, and November being so badly attended as to allow of no business being transacted. At length, in February 1848, symptoms of returning life became evident, in a proposal being made for granting three medals, for the best Essays on subjects connected with Natural History, and the presentation of a number of donations; and, also, by the accession of a considerable addition of new members, the list of whom, making reasonable allowances for those who had not paid up their subscriptions, was this year as high as 144.

In May of the same year, Dr. Sewell was elected President, and Mr. Crofton, Secretary; but, with the exception of a spirited report by Dr. Crawford, the Chairman of the Council, which fortunately found its way into the public prints, (and to extracts from which I propose referring hereafter) nothing further could be learnt of that year's proceedings, there being, strange to say, a gap of 12 months in the *recorded* minutes of the Society's meetings, from that date till May of the following year, when I find them renewed, with Dr. David, as President, Mr. Futvoye, Secretary, and Dr. Gibb, Librarian, &c. During that year, in addition to their being an accession of about 13 ordinary and 7 corresponding members, a very important move was made by the Council (in December in the appointment of a Committee of three members, consisting of Mr. Larocque, Mr. Leeming, and Dr. Leprohon, *to confer with all the literary and scientific societies in the city, with the view of, if possible, bringing about a general union of the whole under one roof.*

But, alas! this excellent movement appears to have been made in vain: for, though this committee was directed to report at the next meeting, I have been unable to trace any record of the result of their endeavours. In the mean time, however, it is due to the zealous curator of the museum and library to state, that active exertions were commenced by him, for bringing both of these departments into a better regulated state.

To conclude my imperfect summary, it is only necessary to add that during the years 1850 and 1851, both of which have been under the presiding guidance of Mr. Ostell, Her Majesty's Government presented to the Society five valuable volumes consisting of the Meteorological Observations at *Toronto, Hobart-town, in Van Dieman's Land, and the Island of St. Helena*, and on the unusual magnetic disturbances; that the keeper of the museum and library has continued his exertions to bring them both into a better state; and that the Council, feeling dissatisfied with the confused manner in which the different departments of the museum have hitherto been

crowded together, have, in spite of a debt of about £250 still due by the Society, come to the determination of making the whole accommodations of their building available for the better arrangement of their valuable collections of specimens and curiosities. Add to which I am authorized to state that before another such audience as this shall have assembled, a far more commodious lecture-room will have been prepared, at the same time that arrangements will have been completed for displaying the interesting contents of the museum to a greater advantage, and thereby rendering them far more attractive to strangers, as well as more satisfactory to the public in general.

I at the same time, however, regret to add, that on a hurried reference to a list of the ordinary members in the Treasurer's Book, I find the number, making a liberal allowance for those who had not paid their subscriptions to 1850, reduced so low as about 70, and of those who from one cause or another have withdrawn from the Society, (nominal lists of both of whom I now hold in my hand) amount to above 50,—thus reducing the present number of members of so valuable an Association, after a lapse of 24 years, to near *one third less than it could boast of at the close of the first year of its existence.*

While contemplating so humiliating a picture of "the march of mind" among so extended a Society as that of Montreal,—a city now containing near 58,000 inhabitants, the seat of cathedrals, of colleges, and of seminaries, and also of high courts of law, as well as ranking as the great commercial metropolis of Canada, it may perhaps appear somewhat insidious to be singling out individual instances of support or backsliding in so good a cause as that of the Natural History Society; but I trust I shall be pardoned for adverting to the melancholy facts, that of the whole of the original honored 26 members, although I believe 7 are still alive, and among these Dr. Holmes, Judge McCord, Rev. Dr. Mathieson, Mr. Corse, and Mr. Try, *one only*, as already remarked—*Dr. Holmes*—has unflinchingly stood by the Society; and that among the other 66 influential members who assembled round its table before the close of its first year, but who, for various reasons, have since withdrawn, we notice the names of the Rev. Dr. Bethune, Hon. Mr. Badgely, Sir George Simpson, Judge Gale, Mr. Benjamin Holmes, Judge Day, Mr. Moses Hays, Mr. Penn, and Mr. Lunn, as still happily to be found among our citizens; whereas, those who have continued to adhere to the Society appear to be limited to the Hon. Messrs. *McGill, Moffatt, and Leslie*, and Messrs. *S. Jerrard, B. Workman, Mr. Sheriff Boston, and Mr. Hew Ramsay!* Of the fluctuating ebb and flow of the Society during subsequent years, I have not attempted to note any particulars, though among the valuable members occasionally enrolled, a few still continue attached to the Society; but I feel bound to record in abstract, in justice to the existing worthy supporters of the Society, that near one half belong

the *mercantile* community, about a third to, or connected with, the medical profession, and about one-seventh to that of the *law*; while, strange to say, the only 2 representatives of the clergy of every denomination are the *Rev. Dr. Leach*, and the *Rev. Mr. DeSola*.

Having so far traced the progress of the Natural History Society from its commencement, let us now take a closer glance at the fruits which it has from time to time produced. To do this effectually, it might perhaps be necessary to advert somewhat in detail to its original Constitution and By-Laws; but we shall be content with calling attention to the leading article of the former, as distinctly declaring that "*the chief object of the Society shall be the investigation of the Natural History of CANADA*;" and we shall for the same reason, quote only one clause of the latter, which assigns the Executive management of its affairs to a Council of 13, composed of all its officers, united with five other members, subdivided into a *Library-Committee*, a *Finance-Committee*, and a *Committee of Publication*, to the latter of whom, (be it remembered,) *all Essays read before the Society shall be referred, to the end that they may select those which may appear of sufficient value, to cause them to be PUBLISHED.*"

This was making a beginning in good earnest. But not content with even this, the Society in the following year, determined to *award medals of merit to the authors of the best ESSAYS on subjects within the range of its objects*, among which, were one "*on the Plants*," and another "*on the Quadrupeds of Canada*," already alluded to. It would, however, appear from the Council's Report of the following year, that the success attending the latter part of the plan had not equalled their expectations, for, though six Essays—3 scientific and 3 literary—were presented for competition, their merits would appear to have been rather doubtful, it being found advisable to intimate that whatever Essays could not bear the ordeal of public criticism, and be *found worthy of publication in THE TRANSACTIONS of the Society*, were to be regarded as falling short of the required standard of merit.—So far good, provided we could hereafter lay our hand upon some such choice fruit as that hoped for.

At the annual meeting of the next year, the Chairman of the Council congratulated the Institution on its having reached its 4th anniversary, and appearing to have surmounted those difficulties that had stifled the attempts of former Associations. But though the Library continued to increase, and the Museum to receive many interesting and valuable additions, in various departments of Natural History, by public and private donations, as well as by purchases made by the Society, its members seem to have felt that they had still to look forward to a *better* fulfilment of its avowed objects, namely, not only "*the advancement of THE STUDY OF NATURAL HISTORY CHIEFLY, but of SCIENCE and LITERATURE in GENERAL*," in none of which departments were there any additions to the Prize Essays.

And even in the following years, so great was the falling off that the Council could not refrain from giving expression to their disappointment;—at the same time that they indulged a reasonable hope that the then recent Act of Incorporation, and the proposed establishment of a Lectureship on Chemistry and Natural History would, ere long, infuse new life into their operations.

Notwithstanding these encouraging forebodings, the next year unfortunately proved less satisfactory than the preceding, though marked by the confirmation of the Charter of Incorporation, and the framing of a *revised Code of By-Laws*—in which, rather to my surprise, I find the article regarding the *publication of Transactions and Essays*, either *accidentally overlooked or intentionally abandoned*.

The year 1835, however, proved to be under happier auspices; for though lectures on different departments of science had not been revived, a then young member (Dr. Hall), who for many years labored zealously in behalf of the Society, made a spirited offer to deliver a popular course of lectures on Botany; but on the time arriving, was actually obliged to abandon it for, as I learn, that very simple reason, *the want of an audience*. It, however, bore away the palm from most of its predecessors, in the presentation, for competition for the Society's medals, of several Essays of merit, among which was one on a very appropriate and interesting subject, namely, "*On the connection between the natural FEATURES of a COUNTRY and the CHARACTER of its INHABITANTS.*" And the following year, being the 9th from its institution, proved equally cheering, as producing a number of additional donations to the Museum, a considerable augmentation of the Library, and an increase in the number of papers read at its meetings, besides the presentation of no less than 9 Essays; though, unfortunately, none were judged of a standard to merit the distinction of a *medal*.

From the year 1837 to 1844, owing to the unfortunate reasons already stated, I have been unable to refer to any official records; but as far as I can learn, the only events worthy of particular notice during that interval, was the liberal Bequest of £1000 by the Rev. Mr. Somerville, already alluded to, so far back as 1838, and the presentation of several medals, among which were one to Mr. William Evans for a prize Essay "*On the Cultivation of Hemp and Flax,*" and another to Dr. Hall, for an Essay "*On the Zoology of the District of Montreal.*"

Between 1844 and 1847, the few circumstances of any note have been already mentioned. But, at length, at the annual meeting in May, 1848, a degree of unusual animation was infused into the proceedings of the Society—judging from the spirited Report of Dr. Crawford, the chairman of the Council—from which one might have been led to anticipate the happiest results. But, alas, with the exception of the subordinate improvements already alluded to, connected with the *Museum* and *Library*, our expectations have remained unrealized to this day.

Among other parts of the Report to which I have so frequently alluded, I take leave to quote the following passages, as particularly in point.

"The existence of a Society such as the *Natural History Society of Montreal*, is calculated to confer great benefits upon the country;—spreading the desire of enquiry, and opening up new channels of investigation, numbering among its members, gentlemen whose scientific acquirements are universally acknowledged, and forming, as it were, a *centre point, towards which the scientific investigations THROUGHOUT THE PROVINCE might be made to converge*. Such were the effects of the establishment of the *Asiatic Society*, whose labors brought to light the long hidden treasures of oriental arts, sciences, and literature, and gave to the world, *in its proceedings*, a mass of matter which individual labor could never have procured or arranged. And in Canada a wide field for such investigations is spread before us; and from similar industry—similar results must follow. Our various literary societies have already lain too long dormant in this respect: there is need to shake off the apathy and take the work in hand. It only requires a commencement: that once made, the rest is easy. '*Tandem fit surculus arbor*,' is true; but the twig requires care and attention, if you wish it either to become a useful tree or bear good fruit: for he were a careless and improvident gardener, who, planting an offset, would sit down patiently, consoling himself with the assurances '*ut tandem fit surculus arbor*.' And, so with our Society. It has taken root; it now needs care and industry, lest it should either die away, or living, *still be barren and unproductive*."

Now, though these otherwise excellent remarks may very properly apply to a society struggling through its doubtful infant state, we cannot well admit the justness of their application to an association that had arrived at the mature age of *twenty-one*, as was the case with the *Natural History Society* in 1848, and which had, moreover, during nearly the whole of that long period, been an annual recipient of the public bounty; and, therefore, instead of being inclined to regard it as a *twig*, requiring care and attention *as such*, we have a right to look for a *sturdy tree, bearing a reasonable portion of goodly fruit*. But how was this to be expected, when the same Council felt obliged to make the following mortifying admission:—

"The Council find deep reason to regret that *the ordinary meetings of the Society are so badly attended*; the more so, as it has several times occurred that business could not be proceeded with for want of a *quorum*. This is not proper; and some effort should be made to obviate it." And further:—"During the past winter, several gentlemen delivered lectures before the Society, which, we regret to say, were not so numerously attended as the subjects treated of deserved, or there was reason to expect there would have been." [Of which, however, there can be no complaint this season.] And yet, while the Council could not help feeling and admitting that "*the Society is an*

institution which only needs industry among its members to place it in the first rank as a means of great public improvement," they were, compelled to wind up their Report in the following very properly *unvarnished* language, disclosing a degree of remissness somewhere in the administration of the Society's affairs, as astounding as the appeal must have afterwards proved mortifying, when found to have been unavailing:—

"The Council, before closing, have to call the attention of the Society to the fact that MANY OF THE RECORDS OF THE SOCIETY appear to have GONE ASTRAY, for it will be in your recollection that a committee was appointed to search for CERTAIN PAPERS, with a view to preparing them for PUBLICATION, and that that committee, AFTER A DILIGENT SEARCH, reported that THEY COULD NOT BE FOUND. We recommend, therefore, that further inquiry should be made into the matter; for the Society should never forget that they are a PUBLIC BODY, holding public property in trust, and are accountable therefor whenever called upon."

Being bound to accept of this candid official document, as exhibiting the actual state of the Natural History Society up to that period, it is only necessary to add to it, that, with the exception of the partial improvements more than once alluded to, little or no change for the better has since taken place; and it, therefore, now becomes our duty to enquire into the cause of so discreditable a state of things, and to venture to suggest such remedy as may seem most advisable; and this we shall endeavour to do in as few words as possible.

One great cause of the present stagnant state of the Natural History Society may perhaps be ascribed to a feeling of mortification experienced by its few remaining members on observing the utter indifference with which the public seem to regard so highly important and valuable an institution; yes, permit me to repeat it, so highly important and valuable an institution—for, assuredly, no public association, if well conducted, can be more so to any country than one having for its noble object the investigation and illustration of its natural history. But may it not also be said, that perhaps the very cause assigned is itself only the natural effect produced on the mind of an observant public, from witnessing, of late years, a total absence of that generous *esprit de corps* which should animate the members of every associated body, but more especially of an intellectual institution whose unceasing aim should be to lead, as well as elevate the tone and standard of the public mind. I freely confess that while I regard both causes as having been nearly equally instrumental in producing the present stagnant state of things, I am, after long attentive observation, rather inclined to attribute more to the latter than the former; at the same time that I am willing to think that a good deal may also be ascribed to a few defects in the Constitution and By-Laws of the Society, which, though scarcely observable or felt while the lively impetus given to its proceedings as a novel and attractive institution con-

tinued to exert its influence, might, now that the novelty of the thing is worn off, be very advantageously amended and improved.

Leaving the details of such amendments, as may be thought advisable, to the leisure consideration of the Council of the Society, it is sufficient for me to venture to proffer a few respectful hints on the subject of what I regard as *the great FIRST step* to be taken towards placing so valuable and useful an association as the Natural History Society *ought* to be, once more in a position to do justice to the patriotic objects contemplated by it; and that can only be done by those belonging to it MAKING A WELL DIRECTED STRENUOUS EFFORT TO REDEEM ITS LOST POPULARITY. Preliminary to this, I have only to ask my audience whether such a Society, *if efficiently conducted by its members, and well supported by the public*, would be of real value and benefit to this—nay, to any—country? and, if that be admitted, which it inevitably must be, I cannot do better than, by way of illustration, advert to some particulars in the early history of a very similar institution, in a far distant land in which I was for many years a sojourner, to which Dr. Crawford opportunely referred in the Report from which I have been quoting; I allude to *the ASIATIC Society*—an association of which I had, and, I trust, still have, the honor of being a humble member.

That justly eminent, but, like your own, often very unequal paced and sometimes almost dormant Society was founded by the well known accomplished *Sir William Jones*, in 1784, and it is still, I believe, in flourishing existence;—*and such, I trust, will also yet be the auspicious fate of that of MONTREAL, in spite of present discouraging circumstances.* Nay, more; I even indulge a hope that, advanced in years as I am, I shall not only live to see that patriotic aspiration realized, but—*provided the work be properly and zealously set about*—to witness the Natural History Society's assumption of the more extended title of "*The Literary, Philosophical, and Natural History Association of CANADA.*"

But to proceed. As the silent reflections of *one* enthusiastic, yet eminently *practical* philosophic mind, "far, far at sea," gave birth to the *Society of Asia*, so, my friends, were I permitted to indulge in personal anecdote, I might trace the germ of one great branch of the *Natural History Society* to the casual botanizing and mineral-hunting rambles of two of your citizens among the wild scenery of your romantic "Mountain;" but I must be content to turn for a moment to a particularly appropriate portion of the fascinating introductory Discourse delivered by the learned and enlightened founder and president of the former society, at its first meeting. After describing the genial feelings and reflections of the auspicious moment that, at sea, gave birth to the idea of forming a Society of philosophical research in Calcutta, and induced him to console himself with the pleasing hope that, if in any country or community such a union could be effected, it was among his countrymen in Bengal, the illustrious president naturally turned, in the first place, to congratulate his associates on the full ac-

complishment of his fondest and most sanguine hopes, through their own noble zeal and alacrity, and then proceeded to take a view of the ample space allotted for their learned investigations—a space bounded only by the geographical limits of Asia, with Hindoostan for its centre, and to suggest, therefore, the name or epithet of “ASIATIC,” as the most classical and appropriate which the Society could assume.

“If it be now asked,” observed Sir William Jones, “what are the intended objects of our inquiries within these spacious limits, we answer, MAN and NATURE; whatever is performed by the one, or produced by the other. Human knowledge has been elegantly analysed according to the three great faculties of the mind, *memory*, *reason*, and *imagination*, which we constantly find employed in arranging and retaining, comparing and distinguishing, combining and diversifying, the ideas which we receive through our senses, or acquire by reflection; hence the three main branches of learning are *history*, *science*, and *art*. The first comprehends either an account of natural productions, or the genuine records of empires and states; the second embraces the whole circle of pure and mixed mathematics, together with ethics and law, as far as they depend on the reasoning faculty; and the third includes all the beauties of imagery, and the charms of invention, displayed in modulated language, or represented by color, figure, or sound.

“Agreeably to this analysis, you will investigate whatever is rare in the stupendous fabric of nature; will correct the geography of Asia by new observations and discoveries; will trace the annals, and even traditions, of those nations, who, from time to time have peopled or desolated it; and will bring to light their various forms of government, with their institutions, civil and religious. You will examine their improvements and methods in arithmetic and geometry, in trigonometry, mensuration, mechanics, optics, astronomy, and general physics; their systems of morality, grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic; their skill in surgery and medicine; and their advancement, whatever it may be, in anatomy and chemistry. To this you will add researches into their agriculture, manufactures and trade; and, whilst you inquire with pleasure into their music, architecture, painting, and poetry, will not neglect those inferior arts by which the comforts and even elegancies of social life are supplied or improved.”

After quoting this very interesting and, even to us, instructive passage, I cannot resist adding that the number of original members of the Asiatic Society who listened to their president's eloquent address was *twenty-six*, and that the number of members who composed the first meeting of the Natural History Society of Montreal was exactly the same.

Though established under such propitious auspices, it was not till four years afterwards that the first volume of the Asiatic Society's Transactions, or, as they are termed, *Researches*, was given to the world, namely, in 1783. In the introduction to that volume, which was hailed by the grateful plaudits of the learned of every European

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nation, we find the following emphatic appeal made by the Society to their countrymen in general throughout Asia, for support :—

“By this publication the institution may be considered as having taken root; but the plant will flourish or fade, according as the remissness of the members and their correspondents shall promote or obstruct its growth. It will flourish, if naturalists, chemists, antiquaries, philologists, and men of science, in different parts of Asia, will commit their observations to writing, and send them to the President or Secretary at Calcutta; it will languish, if such communications shall be long intermitted; and it will die away, if they shall entirely cease; for it is morally impossible that a few men, whatever be their zeal, who have great public duties to discharge, and difficult private studies connected with those duties, can support such an establishment without the most assiduous and eager auxiliaries.”

Now, my friends, supposing us to be animated with equal zeal, let me candidly ask, Is the broad field of British America, or even of Canada alone, much less ample or inviting to its many enlightened British and French *permanent* compatriots than Asia or India were to the comparatively few of our countrymen *temporarily* settled in that distant land? Surely not. And if that be admitted, I am bound to say that the great difference between the Asiatic and the Natural History Society is this, that, although, as far as the laying of the foundation of a rather respectable library, (now containing near 800 volumes,) and the construction of an undeniably valuable collection of minerals and specimens in different departments of natural history, is concerned, you may, in the language of Dr. Crawford, be considered to have, in some degree, “taken root;” yet, until you have given to the world at least *one* volume of Transactions, as an earnest of active life, such as that to which I have alluded to as produced by the Asiatic Society, you cannot, in good faith, be regarded as having borne any *ripe fruit*;—particularly when it is recollected that the latter society was solely dependent for funds on *the subscriptions of its members*, while yours has, in addition thereto, been, more or less, liberally fostered by annual *donations from the public purse*. And, such being the case, surely not only the *Government*, but *the country at large*, have a right to expect some more active and animated exertions on your part than have as yet taken place.

It is possible that I shall be told, under shelter of the remark of the eminent President of the Asiatic Society, which I have just quoted, “that it is morally impossible that a few individuals, whatever be their zeal, who have public duties to discharge, and difficult private studies connected with these, can support such an establishment, without the most assiduous and eager auxiliaries;” but I cannot admit the justness of that application to our more favorably situated, as well as more numerous Society, except in proof of the very “individuals” alluded to—both public and private—being here found either standing coldly aloof, or, after a lukewarm season, abandoning the colors which they ought to defend; or, what is as

bad, "damning with faint praise" the persevering, though perhaps despairing, efforts of the laudable few who still venture to prop up what they may regard as a tottering Institution! I have, at the same time, no doubt, that many of the members who have from time to time retired from the Society, had, as they conceived, good and sufficient cause for so doing; and that complaints of the apathy prevalent among their associates, may with many have been one of their reasons. But is it not possible, that while they complained of such being the case in others, they may, as just observed, have themselves been regarded by others, as a prominent part and parcel of the lethargic mass: and I am the more persuaded of this, from being sensible, from my own observation, that there is quite sufficient talent among our French brethren and ourselves, if guided by a liberal amalgamative spirit, to ensure the most brilliant success to a Society such as that of which I desire to be the earnest though humble advocate. Let us, then, burying in oblivion all past errors, as well as all icy or discordant feeling, rush forward with one accord, with the same "right good will" that animated the meritorious 26 original founders of the Institution; and there need then be no doubt whatever, of the happiest results. Yes: as a beginning, let even the few remaining faithful adherents to the Society's standard exert themselves manfully, and, not only set animated examples themselves, but also cordially invite the heads of all our churches, and seminaries, and professions, and callings,—*for the liberal Republic of letters knows no narrow distinctions of races, creeds, classes, or political parties*,—to join the Reformed ranks—*taking, if they please, my humble self as one of the new Recruits*,—and thereby, at all events, evince a thorough determination to do their very best, to court—

—————"That tide in the affairs of men,
That taken at the flood, leads on to fortune."

There is one eminent and worthy individual now present, who, I trust, will pardon my taking the liberty of naming him, as one who, I am persuaded, would, if invited, be most happy to lend his powerful aid in so good a cause. I allude to the Right Rev. Bishop Fulford;—and if he should lead the way we need not despair of other reverend and learned dignitaries following his good example. Delicacy forbids my saying more. But if there are any gentlemen present who have had the pleasure, as I have had, of perusing a highly interesting letter from His Lordship to the Hon. Peter M^cGill, advocating the institution of a liberal NATIONAL *Canadian Literary and Philosophic Society*, they will thoroughly acquiesce in my feelings and expectations.

And surely our learned *judges* also, who *formerly* set so good an example, are not *now* made of such "sterner stuff" as to be proof against the pleadings—whether in law or equity—of a literary Society craving *judgment* in its favor. Among our other friends of the legal profession we shall also, doubtless, find many additional *clients*

willing to *pay their retaining fee*, if rightly applied to. And, judging from our commercial brethren at present forming so large a portion of the Society's supporters, we may readily look forward to their continued cordial co-operation, provided we can only shew something to our *credit* on our *books*, or prove that we are likely to bring better *samples of our wares* into the *literary market* than heretofore. But it is from our medical friends in particular, that we have a right to expect the most strenuous support in every department of Natural History, each of them in turn forming a part of their liberal professional education. As, however, they have hitherto proved the *working bone and sinew* of the Society, we may reasonably hope that they will cheerfully redouble their exertions, in order to keep their wonted lead. And this, too, I venture to predict, notwithstanding the discouraging, and, as regards the profession generally, most discreditable fact, that one of your own members, after having for 7 years devoted his talents to the conducting of a highly useful and valuable professional journal, has lately been obliged to abandon the undertaking, with great pecuniary loss, from utter want of support! It is scarcely necessary to add that I allude to your talented townsman Dr. Hall, and the *Medical and Physical Journal*.

A few words more, and I have done with my unmerciful trespass on your patience. Permit me then, in conclusion, to entreat those leading and influential local individuals, to whom I have more than once alluded, to bear in mind, that if they have leisure at command, it is not enough to be indolent or lukewarm, though *well-wishing* *SUBSCRIBING* drones in the busy intellectual hive; but that it is their duty either to endeavor to contribute an exemplary active share towards the accumulation of the honied stores of knowledge, or at the least to encourage others by attending the meetings of the Society, and otherwise evincing that they take an interest in the exertions of their associates. And let it also be remembered that all *absent* members, whether ordinary, corresponding, or honorary, have equally a duty to perform to the Society, if in their power, of either transmitting from themselves occasional written communications, or specimens illustrative of any particular branch of natural history, or, as opportunities offer, being instrumental in inducing literary or scientific friends in their neighborhood to favor the Society with such papers or donations as they know will be acceptable. Add to which, let me say to all,—be mindful that though the chief object of the Society be the advancement of the study of *Natural History*, it also embraces, not only *Science* and *Literature*, but *useful knowledge*, in general; and, therefore, instead of being discouraged by imaginary difficulties, let whoever may be disposed to lend their aid in so good a cause, be ever persuaded of the truth of the observation which I candidly applied to myself at the outset of my remarks—and to which I attach so much consequence, that I will venture to repeat it,—as “affording, in my own person, an appropriate example of what I have had some difficulty in convincing most of my friends, namely,

—that to be a useful, *though unlearned*, member of a literary and philosophical society, requires neither the previous qualification of rare literary talents, or great scientific or philosophical acquirements, but simply a sincere love of knowledge, and an earnest desire to seek and profit by every opportunity of acquiring information and instruction in the society of those who may be able to impart it. Nay, I even go farther, and say, that though men of learning may be required to lead the way in the more abstruse and unfrequented paths of research, so intimately are science and philosophy in one way or another united and interwoven with the ordinary pursuits and occupations of life, that, in a society aiming at *mutual instruction*, such as ours is designed to be, it is in the power of almost every reflecting, moderately educated man, to bear a part in the practical illustration of some subject or other, without any previous pretensions to what is termed classical learning."

Trusting, then, that as the fabled Phœnix was, of old, supposed to rise regenerated and full plumed from its own ashes, so the Natural History Society of Montreal may, ere long, not only emerge from its present languishing state, and resume its former promising position, but even aspire to a more elevated and extended literary character, I have only to add an earnest hope, that in whatever I may have been led to remark, I have given personal offence to no one, and that I may even, perchance, have sown the seeds of future good. It, therefore, only remains to tender my sincere thanks for the indulgent attention and commendation which you have been pleased to bestow on my humble efforts, coupled with the fervent valedictory wish that all concerned may in good time, more or less, "*put their shoulders to the wheel*," ever bearing in mind the good old French adage—

"Aide toi ;—le Ciel t'aidera ;"

which, being interpreted, is, in plain English,

"Help yourself, and Providence will help you."

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